THE WORLD.

NUMBER CXII.

By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

To be continued every THURSDAY.

THURSDAY, *February* the 20th, 1755.

A LATE noble author has moſt juſtly and elegantly defined CUSTOM to be *The reſult of the paſſions and prejudices of many, and of the de-ſigns of a few; the ape of reaſon who uſurps her ſeat, exerciſes her power, and is obeyed by mankind in her ſtead.*

THIS definition enables us to account for the various, abſurd and wicked cuſtoms which have ſeverally and ſucceſſively prevailed in all ages and countries, and

and alſo for thoſe which unfortunately prevail in this: for they may all be traced up to *the paſſions and prejudices of many, and to the deſigns of a few.*

IT is certain, however, that there has not been a time, when the prerogative of human reaſon was more freely aſſerted, nor errors and prejudices more ably attacked and expoſed by the beſt writers, than now. But may not the principal of inquiry and detection be carried too far, or at leaſt made too general? And ſhould not a prudent diſcrimination of caſes be attended to?

A PREJUDICE is by no means neceſſarily (though generally thought ſo) an error. On the contrary, it may be a moſt unqueſtioned truth, though it be ſtill a prejudice in thoſe who without any examination, take it upon truſt, and entertain it by habit.

THERE are even ſome prejudices founded upon error, which ought to be connived at, or perhaps encouraged; their effects being more beneficial to ſociety, than their detection can poſſibly be.

HUMAN reaſon, even when improved by knowledge, and undiſturbed by the paſſions, is not an infallible, though it is our beſt guide: but unimproved by knowledge, and adulterated by paſſion, it becomes the moſt dangerous one; conſtituting obſtinate wrong-headedneſs, and dignifying, nay, almoſt ſanctifying error.

THE bulk of mankind have neither leiſure nor knowledge ſufficient to reaſon right: why then ſhould they be taught to reaſon at all? Will not honeſt inſtinct prompt, and wholſome prejudices guide them much better than half-reaſoning?

THE

THE power of the magiſtrate to puniſh bad, and the authority of thoſe of ſuperior rank to ſet good examples, properly exerted, would probably be of more diffuſive advantage to ſociety, than the moſt learned theological, philoſophical, moral and caſuiſtical diſſertations. As for inſtance:

AN honeſt cobler in his ſtall, thinks and calls himſelf a good proteſtant; and, if he lives at the city end of the town, probably goes to his pariſh church on ſundays. Would it be honeſt, would it be wiſe, to ſay to this cobler, "Friend, you only think yourſelf a member of "the church of England; but in reality you are not "one, ſince you are only ſo from habit and prejudice, "not from examination and reflection. But ſtudy the "ableſt controverſial writers of the popiſh and reformed "churches; read Bellarmine, Chillingworth and Stil-"lingfleet, and then you may juſtly call yourſelf, what "in truth you are not now, a proteſtant?"

SHOULD our mender of ſhoes follow this advice (which I hope he would not) a uſeful cobler would moſt certainly be loſt, in a uſeleſs polemic, and a ſcurvy logician.

IT would be juſt the ſame thing in morals. Our cobler received from his parents that beſt and ſhorteſt of all chriſtian and moral precepts, *do as you would be done by:* he adopted it without much examination, and ſcrupulouſly practiſed it in general, though with ſome few exceptions perhaps in his own trade. But ſhould ſome philoſopher, for the advancement of truth and knowledge, aſſure this cobler, "That his honeſty was mere "prejudice and habit, becauſe he had never ſufficiently

"conſidered

" conſidered the relation and fitneſs of things, nor " contemplated the beauty of virtue; but that if he " would carefully ſtudy the Characteriſtics, the moral " philoſopher, and thirty or forty volumes more upon that " ſubject, he might then, and not till then, juſtly call " himſelf an honeſt man;" what would become of the honeſty of the cobler after this uſeful diſcovery, I do not know; but this I very well know, that he ſhould no longer be My cobler.

I SHALL borrow him in two inſtances more, and then leave him to his honeſt, uſeful, home-ſpun prejudices, which half-knowledge and leſs reaſoning will, I hope, never tempt him to lay aſide.

MY cobler is alſo a politician. He reads the firſt news-paper he can get, deſirous to be informed of the ſtate of affairs in Europe, and of the ſtreet robberies in London. He has not, I preſume, analyſed the intereſts of the reſpective countries of Europe, nor deeply conſidered thoſe of his own: ſtill leſs is he ſyſtematically informed of the political duties of a citizen and a ſubject. But his heart and his habits ſupply thoſe defects. He glows with zeal for the honour and proſperity of old England; he will fight for it, if there be occaſion, and drink to it perhaps a little too often, and too much. However, is it not to be wiſhed that there were in this country ſix millions of ſuch honeſt and zealous, though uninformed citizens?

ALL theſe unreflected and unexamined opinions of our cobler, though prejudices in him, are in themſelves undoubted and demonſtrable truths, and ought therefore to be cheriſhed even in their coarſeſt dreſs. But I ſhall

now

now give an inſtance of a common prejudice in this country, which is the reſult of error, and which yet I believe no man in his ſenſes would deſire ſhould be expoſed or removed.

Our honeſt cobler is thoroughly convinced, as his fore-fathers were for many centuries, that one Engliſhman can beat three Frenchmen; and, in that perſuaſion, he would by no means decline the trial. Now, though in my own private opinion, deduced from phyſical principles, I am apt to believe that one Engliſhman could beat no more than two Frenchmen of equal ſtrength and ſize with himſelf, I ſhould however be very unwilling to undeceive him of that uſeful and ſanguine error, which certainly made his countrymen triumph in the fields of Poictiers and Crecy.

But there are prejudices of a very different nature from theſe; prejudices not only founded on original error, but that give birth and ſanction to the moſt abſurd, extravagant, impious and immoral cuſtoms.

Honour, that ſacred name, which ought to mean the ſpirit, the ſupererogation of virtue, is, by cuſtom, prophaned, reduced and ſhrunk to mean only a readineſs to fight a duel upon either a real or an imaginary affront, and not to cheat at play. No vices nor immoralities whatſoever blaſt this faſhionable character, but rather, on the contrary, dignify and adorn it: and what ſhould baniſh a man from all ſociety, recommends him in general to the beſt. He may, with great honour, ſtarve the tradeſmen, who by their induſtry ſupply not only his wants, but his luxury. He may debauch his friend's wife, daughter or ſiſter; he may, in ſhort, unboundedly gratify every appetite